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Chapter Seven

The Gift and Mutual Recognition

Paul Ricoeur as a Reader of Marcel Hénaff

Alain Loute

The theme of the "gift" is of paramount importance in the work of Ricoeur. It is found, indeed, in many of Ricoeur's writings (*Love and Justice*, *Memory, History, Forgetting* and *The Course of Recognition*, amongst others). Ricoeur does not consider the gift as a minor, secondary problem of his ethical and political thought. It seems that for Ricoeur, we encounter something primordial at stake in exchanges of generous gifts, and in order to convince ourselves of the significance of the "gift" in Ricoeur, it suffices to read the pages he has devoted at the end of *The Course of Recognition* (Ricoeur 2005) to the re-reading of Mauss' *Essai sur le don* proposed by Marcel Hénaff in *The Price of Truth* (Hénaff 2010).

For Ricoeur, the latter's reflections on the reciprocal ceremonial gift allow us to find a way out of the perplexities raised by a theory of recognition as advocated by someone like Axel Honneth. Although Ricoeur acknowledges his debt to Honneth, the latter's theory of the struggle for recognition, according to him, in fact poses a possible impasse: "Does not the claim for affective, juridical, and social recognition, through its militant, conflictual style, end up as an indefinite demand, a kind of 'bad infinity'?" (Ricoeur 2005, 218) Doesn't the prospect of an interminable struggle for recognition generate "a new form of the 'unhappy consciousness,' as either an incurable sense of victimization or the indefatigable postulation of unattainable ideals?" (Ricoeur 2005, 218).

For Ricoeur, it is the experiences of peaceful recognition brought forth and sustained by the practice of gift giving which enable those involved in the struggle for recognition to escape this new form of unhappy unconsciousness and prevent themselves from falling into the abyss of fatalism or vio-

lence. By making this claim, Ricoeur is not suggesting that we should replace our legal and economic systems by the utopia of a generalized system based upon the exchange of gifts. Practices of gift-giving are rare, exceptional moments, through which the actors involved have a symbolic experience of an authentic moment of mutual recognition, which Ricoeur calls "a state of peace." These symbolic experiences motivate us to persevere in the struggle for recognition by giving us a peaceful coexistence to think as a possible. They offer "a confirmation that the moral motivation for struggles for recognition is not illusory." (Ricoeur 2005, 218). Ricoeur argues that his thesis is "related to that of Marcel Henaff in *Le prix de la vérité*." (Ricoeur 2005, 153). He therefore writes that "the struggle for recognition would lose itself in the unhappy consciousness if it were not given to humans to be able to accede to an actual, albeit symbolic, experience of mutual recognition, following the model of the reciprocal ceremonial gift." (Ricoeur 2005, 226).

This thesis is strong. If we follow the letter of Ricoeur's text, then exchanges of generous gifts actually render *possible* harmonious coexistence. Without the generosity of these gifts, life with and for other in just institutions wouldn't be possible. This thesis, however, raises a certain number of questions. First of all, anyone familiar with Marcel Hénaff's work would find such an assertion surprising to say the least. It hardly seems even possible to link the reciprocal ceremonial gift with states of peace, which Ricoeur defines by means of the concept of *agape*, a gift without any expectation of return. Even if it is generous, the reciprocal ceremonial gift between groups in traditional societies is inextricably a challenge directed at the other, the provocation of a response. The ceremonial gift therefore cannot be assimilated to a pure "state of peace." As Hénaff puts it, "the background of the relationship remains agonistic; consensus is not a given but a horizon." (Hénaff 2010, 139). Furthermore, he specifies that, in our political societies, the ceremonial gift is no longer the procedure through which reciprocal public recognition operates. In our societies, the process of recognition plays out trough money and law. Therefore, by thinking the contemporary practices of gift-giving by means of the model of the ceremonial gift, doesn't Ricoeur run the risk of being accused of anachronism?

Are we dealing with a misunderstanding, a misconstruction, on the part of Ricoeur? Or is it rather an all too hasty interpretation of an author looking for support for his own thinking? In this article, I intend to revisit interpretation of Marcel Hénaff's work on the ceremonial gift given to us by Ricoeur. If we read the writings which Ricoeur has devoted to Hénaff, it appears that they testify less to a misunderstanding on the part of Ricoeur as to a rereading and appropriation of the work of the former from the perspective of his own project of a fundamental anthropology of *l'homme capable*. It would suffice to just look at his article, "'Considérations sur la triade: le sacrifice, la dette, la grâce' selon Marcel Hénaf" (Ricoeur 2004a), to become convinced of the

extensive care with which Ricoeur read *Le prix de la vérité*. As an attentive and generous reader, he is well aware that, for Hénaff, the ceremonial gift in traditional societies is not a moral gift (Ricoeur 2004a, 37) and that the rituals codifying it are circumstantial and local. If he persists in establishing a connection between his concept of a "state of peace" and the model of reciprocal ceremonial gift, it is because he is reflecting upon the possibility that moralization is a way by which "*expériences-témoin*" (Ricoeur 2004a, 37) like those of gift-giving or sacrifice could be cut loose from the "limitations culturelles qui en constituent l'historicité et ainsi s'élèvent de l'historique au fondamental." (Ricoeur 2004a, 37).[1] He is trying to draw out that which, within ethnological inquiry (history), refers to the (fundamental) anthropological level. In other words, he is, by passing through the historical, attempting to bring forth the attestation of "capacités transhistoriques, transculturelles où se reconnaît l'humanité de l'homme" (Ricoeur 2004a, 37).[2] My thesis is that, for Ricoeur, *agape*, the ability to unilaterally give generously without any expectation of return, derives from this transhistorical level of a fundamental anthropology. Ricoeur sees in this capacity something that can make authentic reciprocity possible.

In this article, my goal isn't to criticize Ricoeur's interpretation of the reciprocal ceremonial gift in the interest of being faithful to the Marcel Hénaff's work. If I intend on revisiting the Ricoeurian reappropriation of Hénaff's reflections, it is because I would like to suggest it offers us a way to unearth various presuppositions underlying Ricoeur's ethics and politics. I think, in fact, that the problematic of the gift, far from leading us astray in an investigation into Ricoeur's political thinking, actually enables us to identify its fundamental assumptions. Such work seems to me essential. It enables us to avoid making use of a part of Ricoeur's political thinking without first coming to terms with what it presupposes.

In the first section, I will begin by showing the role that Hénaff's reflections play within Ricoeur's work. In order to do this, we must revisit the "*petite éthique*" of Ricoeur. I will particularly insist on a dialectic essential to the understanding of the latter, that is, the dialectic between the logic of equivalence of justice and the excessive logic of love. Then, in the second section, taking Marcel Hénaff himself as a starting point, I will draw out and question various presuppositions of Ricoeur's position.

PAUL RICOEUR AS A READER OF MARCEL HÉNAFF: THE GIFT AS SYMBOLIC MUTUAL RECOGNITION

In order to understand the role which the reference to the gift plays in the philosophy of Ricoeur, we must understand a fundamental tension that runs through Ricoeur's "*petite éthique*." Let us, for this purpose, start with the

well-known triad of the ethical aim, the moral norm and the practical wisdom. The ethical aim is defined as the teleological aim of a "good life with and for others in just institutions." As for the second member of the triad, the stage of the moral norm expresses the deontological moment of a "test" for the ethical aim.

Although irreducible to one another, the ethical aim and the moral norm cannot be conceptualized in abstraction from one other. Let's start with the former. The ethical aim must pass the examination of the moral norm. This allows the actor seeking the good life to test his desire and assure themselves that they are not mistaken. Ricoeur therefore says that the rule of universalization is "no more than a criterion of control, allowing an agent to test his or her good will in claiming to be 'objective' in the maxims of his or her action." (Ricoeur 1991, 199). The moral norm is also that which allows the actor to assure themselves that their sense of justice is not driving them to commit acts of injustice. The demand to pass through the scrutiny of norms also arises at the political level. If it's indeed so, it's due to the "paradoxical" character of politics. On the one hand, Ricoeur defines politics by the spatial image of a "public space of appearance" which enables our practices to realize themselves in a horizon of public peace. On the other hand, Ricoeur underlines that political power is an opportunity for the exercise of domination between rulers and the ruled and of a violence beyond compare. Because the political remains marked by violence, if we are to live together harmoniously, we have to submit ourselves to the scrutiny of the deontological principles of justice. It's by means of a reading of John Rawls' procedural conception of justice that Ricoeur identifies the features of the normative demand as it arises at the institutional level. This deontological conception of justice arises as a criticism of the teleological approach of utilitarianism and its sacrificial logic.

But neither does Ricoeur conceive of morality in isolation from the ethical aim. The reason for this is that the rule of universalization is a purely formal rule. Its role is not to say what we should do, but rather to test various proposed actions. We need maxims in order to give content to the moral rule. Concerning the content of our maxims, we learn it by life practice, by ethical experience. It's in the aim of the good life with and for others in just institutions that proposed actions become meaningful. The question of the content of our maxims is not the only argument for lack of self-sufficiency displayed by morality. The question of motivation presents another reason. The self-referentiality of morality masks the fact that norms, if taken by themselves, cannot give the actor motivation needed to recognize their normativity. There is no normativity of action if they have not given way to desire.[3] The ethical aim motivates the actor to submit themselves to moral obligation. Even in the non-utilitarian conception of Rawls, the ethical aim is presupposed. For Ricoeur, far from being independent of any teleological perspective at all, this conception of justice is based upon a pre-understanding of the just and the unjust.

A complementarity thus appears between the teleological and the deontological perspective. On the one hand, the ethical aim must realize itself by undergoing and passing the examination of the norm, and, on the other hand, there can be no such thing as the normativity of norms without the presupposition of an ethical aim. To put it differently, the ethical aim constitutes the purpose of morality, the latter posing itself as the mediation of the ethical aim. If we started this section by asserting that a tension runs through Ricoeurian "*petite éthique*," it is because the relationship between the ethical aim and the moral norm displays a fundamental disproportion. The ethical aim of "a good life with and for others in just institutions" is always greater than, exceeds, what an action subjected to moral norms can achieve. In other words, a moral action which could completely realize the ethical aim is impossible. Any action, including an action subject to a norm, remains a violent action. "Under its most measured and legitimate form, justice is already a manner of returning evil for evil." (Ricoeur 1965, 237). Consequently, Ricoeur writes: "morality is held to constitute only a limited, although legitimate and even indispensable, actualization of the ethical aim." (Ricoeur 1992, 170).

During the application of norms in situation, the third moment of the "*petite éthique*" where the exercise of what Ricoeur calls practical wisdom comes into play, conflicts between the ethical aim and the moral norm can emerge. These cannot be reduced to mere problems of motivation or difficulties taking into account the context surrounding the realization of norms. Rather, I would argue that, for Ricoeur, what we see in these conflicts is the infinite claim of the ethical aim, the realization of which is the task of the norm.[4] The ethical aim is revealed as a purpose beyond the reach of morality. Resulting from this disproportion between the excess of ethics and the *measure* of moral norms is the claim that the realization of the ethical aim constitutes an infinite task, the synthesis of morality and ethics being beyond the reach of human action. Consequently, Ricoeur mentions, in his discussion of the work of Axel Honneth, the *interminable* character of the struggle for recognition. Recognition constitutes an ideal guiding the struggle for recognition, but which can never be fully achieved. The struggle for recognition is to be continually taken up.[5] We can now begin to better understand the question that Ricoeur addresses to Honneth: Doesn't the prospect of an interminable struggle for recognition risk creating "a new form of the 'unhappy consciousness,' as either an incurable sense of victimization or the indefatigable postulation of unattainable ideals?" (Ricoeur 2005, 218)

Although the fundamental disproportion between the ethical aim and moral norms is unsurpassable, this form of an unhappy consciousness, marked by fatalism and despair, doesn't constitute the last word of Ricoeurian ethics. For Ricoeur, the realization of the ethical aim of a "good life with and for others in just institutions" remains *possible*. But what, then, according to Ricoeur, could manage to transform despair into hope? In order to answer this question, we must retrace our steps and more deeply explore the dialectic of the ethical aim and moral norms from the angle of another dialectic present in his work, namely, that of the dialectic between the logic of equivalence of justice and the excessive logic of love (Ricoeur 1990). Above all, Ricoeur emphasizes the disproportion between the two terms. On the one hand, justice falls into a logic of equivalence. Thus, the purpose of distributive justice is to give each person their share by pursuing the objective of proportional equality, and in a similar vein restorative justice seeks to make punishment proportionate to the offense. On the other hand, faced with this logic, love, in the sense of the concept of *agape*, is distinguished by the superabundance of its generosity. It is completely and utterly in excess. It ignores calculation and comparison. It is giving without any expectation of return.

For Ricoeur, when its dialectic relation to justice is established, love doesn't demand less justice, but rather, more justice. Love commands justice to exceed its own limits. Love urges justice to broaden the circle of mutual recognition (Ricoeur 1994, 31). And Ricoeur adds that love does not only act in extension, but also in intensity. It enjoins justice to recognize the singularity and nonsubstitutional nature of every person. If we follow Ricoeur's argument, love motivates and enjoins us to persevere and to believe in justice. It should be noted at the outset that Ricoeur doesn't at any given moment insinuate that we should replace justice with love. Taking the exception—love—for law would only lead to injustice. When faced with acts of injustice, justice is always necessary. Rather, he expects that love will motivate us to increasingly realize the aim of "a good life with and for others in just institutions." Rather than replacing one with another, Ricoeur argues for an intrinsic, reciprocal relationship between justice and love.

Similarly, when Ricoeur claims that the risk of a new form of unhappy consciousness can only be averted through the symbolic experience of "states of peace"—which he defines through the concept of *agape*—he does not claim that we should leave the horizon of the struggle for recognition for the utopia of a peaceful world of love. In other words, Ricoeur does not seek to replace the conflictual action for recognition with a nonviolent action, which, in its intransigence, would simply risk to divert us from the world of action. Ricoeur speaks of a "pairing" (Ricoeur 2005, 218), a "*mise en couple*," of the struggle for recognition and the "states of peace." Displaying an intrinsic

dialectical relation to the struggle for recognition, states of peace offer us "a confirmation that the moral motivation for struggles for recognition is not illusory." (Ricoeur 2005, 218).

Limiting ourselves to these explications, one cannot but notice that the dialectic of love and justice remains enigmatic. How can love affect justice? How can it command justice to exceed its own limits? How, all said and done, does the dialectic of the excessive logic of love and the logic of equivalence of justice realize itself in Ricoeur's philosophy? It should be noted, at the risk of repeating ourselves, that this disproportion is unsurpassable. Consequently, the Ricoeurian dialectic does not consist in an initial tension between two terms which a third term then permits us to overcome. The mediation between terms which are in tension with one another only takes place through practical, provisional mediations, which can never cancel out the fundamental disproportion between love and justice. Ricoeur therefore writes in *L'amour et la justice*: "Here by dialectic I mean, on the one hand, the acknowledgment of the initial disproportionality between our two terms and, on the other hand, the search for practical mediations between them—mediations, let us quickly say, that are always fragile and provisory." (Ricoeur 1995, 315).

What exactly, then, are, are these practical mediations? In his *The Course of Recognition*, Ricoeur, questioning how a bridge can be build between justice and love, evokes the practice of gift-giving: "The privileged occasion for this confrontation is precisely that of the gift." (Ricoeur 2005, 224). By gift, Ricoeur understands a unilateral gift in the spirit of *agape*, a generous gift without any expectation of return. Ricoeur's thesis is that the exchange of these generous gifts constitutes a privileged experience in which the excess of love could act on the logic of equivalence of justice. These practices would be the occasion of a symbolic experience of genuine mutual recognition, beyond that which the rules of equivalence as we see in the legal system and market economy enjoin us acknowledge. These experiences of peaceful recognition show us and enable us to think of mutual recognition as a *possible* end for the struggle for recognition. Or, to put it differently by taking up the categories of his "*petite éthique*" presented above, we could say that, for Ricoeur, these symbolic experiences allow us to think the end toward which all ethics moves, and whose realization is the task of morality, as a *possible*.

Now we must demonstrate how this Ricoeurian thesis emerges out of an interpretation of the ceremonial gift as symbolic mutual recognition, which we have only so far alluded to. Such a task is not easy. The thesis itself brings forth a multitude of questions. We may doubt, first of all, if it is even still legitimate to refer to the ceremonial gift in the context of our contemporary capitalist societies. Ricoeur responds directly to this question with the following: "Whatever may have been the archaic origins of the economy of the gift [. . .], gifts are still given in our societies, even when these are dominat-

ed by the market economy where everything has a price, albeit as dominated by social codes governing the relations between gifts and gifts in return." (Ricoeur 2005, 224). But even if one is willing to grant that gift exchange continues to be practiced in our societies, other issues remain. Can we think of an *exchange* of gifts by means of a concept of giving related to the concept of *agape*? Is it legitimate to expect that the gift, thought in terms of the modality of *agape*, could make a *social* experience of mutual recognition possible? Doesn't Ricoeur himself say that "People who act out of *agape* [. . .] do not go beyond their initial gesture, because they expect nothing in return?" (Ricoeur 2005, 225)

Let's closely follow the movement of Ricoeur's argument by going through the analysis of different theories of the gift which he offers. Ricoeur takes as his starting point the problem of the gift and the gift in return as it had been put forth by Marcel Mauss. The latter, as Ricoeur indicates to us, devoted himself to explaining a puzzle generated by the exchange of gifts among indigenous peoples such as the Maori of New Zealand. Citing Mauss, Ricoeur says:

> How are we to explain "the prestations which are in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, but are in fact obligatory and interested"? What accounts for the connection linking these three obligations: to give, to receive, to give in return? Mauss formulates the question as follows: "What force is there in the thing given which compels the recipient to make a return?" (Ricoeur 2005, 328).[6]

In response to these questions, Ricoeur reminds us the well-known reply of Mauss. For the latter, the obligation to give in return proceeds from the thing exchanged. Adopting the language of the people observed in the study, Mauss evokes the *hau*, the force in the gift which compels or obliges one to give in return.

L'Essai sur le don has given rise to a variety of debates. Various authors have criticized Mauss for giving credibility to the actors' own interpretation of their practice and have tried to propose "a systematic vision of the sequence of gift and gift in return" (Ricoeur 2005, 228–229) which breaks with the justification given by the social agents. Ricoeur proposes that we qualify such an approach toward the gift and the gift in return as a "logic of reciprocity." He mentions, as an example, Mark Rogin Anspach's book *A charge de revanche: Figures élémentaires de la réciprocité* (Anspach 2002). Ricoeur cites Anspach: "A relation of reciprocity cannot be reduced to an exchange between two individuals. A transcendent third term emerges in each instance, even if this third term is nothing other than the relation itself, imposing itself as a separate actor entirely." (Anspach 2002, 5).[7] The emergence of this transcendent third term refers to a phenomenon of self-transcendence, to the relationship of exchange as transcendent totality emerging from the gift ex-

changes amongst the actors. A third term therefore transcends the actors, all the while being produced by the exchanges being carried out between them. In such a "systematic vision," the obligation to give in return can be explained by means of a "circular causality" (Ricoeur 2005, 230) unearthed by the theorist between "a first level where the separate operations take place between the actors and the metalevel where the third term resides that incarnates the exchange as something transcendent;" (Anspach 2002, 45);[8] the *hau*, the force which obliges to give in return, being for the theorist nothing but "a reification of the circulation of gifts themselves." (Anspach 2002, 42).[9]

Ricoeur acknowledges that such a systemic vision of the sequence of gift and gift in return distances us an understanding of the exchange of gifts as understood by the concept of *agape*, a gift without the expectation of return. Rather than making us of an idea of generosity without expectation of return, the systematic explanation of the logic of reciprocity explains the enigma of the gift and the countergift by means of the global circulation of gifts. In this type of theory, as Ricoeur points out, "It is always owing to a global circuit that a return can be expected." (Ricoeur 2005, 231). According to this position, that which enjoins the chain of gifts and countergifts to perpetuate itself is not to be sought within the *excess* of a generous gesture, but rather in a *rule* of exchange transcending the actors. In face of this explanatory model which makes actors the agents of a logic of reciprocity, of a transcendent totality which emerges from the interactions between actors, Ricoeur stresses the necessity of a phenomenological approach centered around the intentions of the gift. The object of such a phenomenology would be what Ricoeur calls the relationship of mutuality, that is, the relations *between* the actors of the exchange, which he distinguishes from the logic of reciprocity transcending the actors and their interactions. Regarding this analytical distinction between mutuality and reciprocity, Ricoeur writes the following: "In accord with linguistic convention, I shall reserve the term *mutuality* for such exchanges between individuals, and use *reciprocity* for those systematic relations for which such ties of mutuality constitute only one of the 'elementary forms' of such reciprocity." (Ricoeur 2005, 232–233)

For Ricoeur, the legitimacy of a phenomenological approach towards mutuality forces itself upon us if the analyst shifts his attention from "reciprocity that operates above our heads" (Ricoeur 2005, 231) to the question of the emergence of the global process of exchange. The entry into the gift/countergift relationship depends upon a first gift, a risk-taking which falls upon the actors. Such a question implies returning to the level of the interactions between actors. Moreover, "if reciprocity does circulate fluidly, it is important that the actors not interrupt this flow, but help maintain it. [. . .] the giver and the receiver, on the plane of action, bear the risky, contingent burden of undertaking and carrying through the exchange between them-

selves." (Ricoeur 2005, 231). The enigma of the gift and the gift in return only reveals its secrets if we plunge head first into the "'immanent' dimension of mutuality (in order to oppose it to the self-transcendence of reciprocity)." (Ricoeur 2005, 230).

In order to give an account of what is at stake in the relationship of mutuality, Ricoeur relies upon the rereading of *l'Essai sur le don* proposed by Marcel Hénaff. Ricoeur stresses that, for Hénaff, that which in the gift compels us to give in return is not a magical force or the "reinterpretation in logical terms of this magical force" (Ricoeur 2005, 235)—the relation of exchange as a third term—but rather "une reconnaissance tacite symboliquement figurée dans le don." (Ricoeur 2004c, 24) Ricoeur therefore writes:

> What is revolutionary about Henaff's proposal is that he shifts the emphasis from the relation between giver and recipient to seek the key to our enigma in the very mutuality of the exchange 'between' the protagonists, calling this shared operation mutual recognition. The initial enigma of a force supposed to reside in the object itself is dissipated if we take the thing given and returned as the pledge of and substitute for this process of recognition. It is the pledge of the giver's commitment through the gift and a substitute for the trust that this gesture will be reciprocated. (Ricoeur 2005, 236).

Ricoeur interprets the reciprocal ceremonial gift analyzed by Hénaff as a symbolic mutual recognition. The thing given and then given in return symbolizes the relation of mutual recognition. He adds that this form of recognition "does not recognize itself, to the extent that it is more invested in the gesture than in the words that accompany it. It can only do so by symbolizing itself in the gift." (Ricoeur 2005, 236).

Ricoeur appropriates this conception of the reciprocal ceremonial gift as symbolic mutual recognition by linking it to the concept of *agape*, a unilateral gift without the expectation of return. He therefore claims the following: "dans le cadre de l'interprétation du don cérémoniel en termes de reconnaissance mutuelle symbolique par la chose donnée, ne peut-on intégrer le moment du don sans retour, comme appel à une générosité similaire?" (Ricoeur 2004a, 44).[10] The first gift, a risk-taking which starts the whole process of the exchange of gifts, must be understood through the model of *agape*, as giving without expectation of return. According to Ricoeur, only the excess of this generous, unilateral gift is able to initiate the process of gift and gift in return. The generosity of this gift would not then lead to an obligation to give in return,[11] which "would, properly speaking, mean annulling the first gift," (Ricoeur 2005, 242), but would rather lead to "a response to a call coming from the generosity of the first gift." (Ricoeur 2005, 243). For Ricoeur, the gift in return, rather than restituting the first gift, must also be conceived through the model of the gift as a form of *agape*; the second gift must be thought of "as a kind of second first gift." (Ricoeur 2005, 242).

The unilateral generous gift as a form of *agape* is that which protects "the good side of this actual experience of mutual recognition." (Ricoeur 2005, 241). It would seem that, for Ricoeur, without the excess of the gift as a form of *agape*, symbolic mutual recognition would be impossible. For him, the exchange of gifts is always in the risk of being corrupted, of really being the form of a disguised market economy. He discusses the critical function of the unilaterality of *agape* as that which permits us to separate authentic experiences of mutual recognition from forms of gift exchange motivated by hidden interests and which tend to level out all the exchange of generous, excessive gifts by reducing them to the logic of monetary equivalence.

We began this section by pointing out the fundamental tension that runs through Ricoeurian ethics: the aim of a good life is in excess in relation with what moral norms actually permit us to achieve. Or, to put it differently, recognition is an ideal which guides the struggle for recognition, but which can never be fully achieved. The struggle for recognition is interminable. However, Ricoeurian ethics does not conclude with the form of an unhappy consciousness marked by fatalism and despair. For Ricoeur, the actors of the struggle for recognition can experience something which gives them a peaceful coexistence to think as a possible and which transforms fatalism into hope. These experiences, which Ricoeur calls "states of peace," are precisely those experiences of symbolic mutual recognition accessible to the actors by means of the exchange of generous gifts. For Ricoeur, if the symbolic experience of an authentic mutual recognition was not *given* to us in the exchange of gifts, we would fall into the abyss of despair or violence.[12]

Ricoeur's position is strong. Everything happens as if the very *possibility* of "the good life with and for others in just institutions"—or partnership in the struggle for recognition—is based upon these experiences of generous gifts, as if ethical life ultimately depends upon the capacity for *agape*. Such a thesis raises a multitude of questions. Ricoeur's remarks may even astonish someone acquainted with work of Marcel Hénaff. When we look at Marchel Hénaff's analyses, we do not find any "state of pace" or any trace of a unilateral, generous gift in the reciprocal ceremonial gift-giving between groups in primitive societies. The goal of this article, as noted in the introduction, is not to criticize the Ricoeurian interpretation of the reciprocal ceremonial gift in the interest of being faithful to the work of Marcel Hénaff. Rather, my aim is to take this opportunity to unearth certain presuppositions of Ricoeur's ethics and politics.

MARCEL HÉNAFF AS A CRITIC OF PAUL RICOEUR: RECIPROCAL AND THE GRACIOUS GIFT

Before criticizing Ricoeur's interpretation of the work of Marcel Hénaff, we must recognize that Ricoeur is well aware that, for Hénaff, that which is at stake in the ceremonial gift is anything but a form of market economy or a marginal, exotic social practice. What is at stake is nothing less than a process of recognition. Ricoeur has also rightly highlighted the fact that it is through the thing given and received that that those involved in the exchange of gifts can recognize one another. In fact, for Hénaff:

> Human recognition of the other, whether person or group, always takes place through the gesture by which one holds out a *mediating object* to the other, presenting the other with something that one is giving as a part of oneself and venturing into alien space. [. . .] It can be said that this is the very gesture of symbolism, if we accept as etymology shows, that a symbol is a physical element that stands for a pact: *sum-bolon* literally means what is placed together. (Hénaff 2010, 132).

The thing exchanged plays the role of a pledge and a substitute for oneself, "*it is an extension of the very being of the giver who gives himself through it.*" (Hénaff 2010, 134). Giving means giving up a bit of oneself, risking a bit of oneself through the thing given. By receiving a good, one receives a little of the other within oneself. Speaking about the *waygu'a*, one of the precious goods that the Trobriand people exchange amongst each other, Hénaff writes:

> its provenance, former owners, and history are known, and its high value is a function of the entire memory that it embodies; thus an entire network of personal bond is woven between the partners. A variety of interwoven interpersonal networks symbolized by these precious goods thus develops throughout archipelago communities. (Hénaff 2010, 118).

Relying upon anthropological and primatological studies, Marcel Hénaff demonstrates that this procedure of reciprocal recognition by the mediation of a thing is uniquely human. It does not occur in any group of primates.[13] Even if Ricoeur had clearly seen that the ceremonial gift is fundamentally a procedure of recognition between human beings, the fact remains that what Hénaff means by "ceremonial gift" has little if anything to do with what Ricoeur calls "states of peace." The ceremonial gift in primitive societies is agonistic, consensus and peace constituting a borderline state.

> Gift exchange is a ceremonial duel in which autonomous beings who wish to associate without relinquishing their freedom confront each other. This is why a failed encounter can degenerate into conflict. To give is at the same time to give up what is being given and to prevail through what has been given: it is at the same time offering and challenge, game and pact, agreement always on the verge of disagreement, peace at the edge of a potential conflict. (Hénaff 2010, 139).

This intrinsically conflictual character does not mean that generosity is absent in the ceremonial gift. The ceremonial gift is a generous gift, but not in the sense of a gift as a form of *agape*. The purpose of the ceremonial gift's generosity is to challenge the partner and to oblige him to respond. We give a lot in order to provoke him. As a form of *agape*, the gift's generosity is superabundant, excessive. The objective of this excess of generosity is not to challenge the other. It is without the exception of return.

Another fundamental difference between the generous gift as a form of *agape* and the ceremonial gift is that the latter occurs between social groups and not between individuals such as it appears to be the case in Ricoeur. The practice of the ceremonial gift is not carried out by individuals, but rather by representatives of social groups. It constitutes, in the words of Mauss, a "total social fact": "in these exchanges society acts as such, as undivided reality, even though it does so through individual figures such as chiefs of clans or lineages." (Hénaff 2010, 120). Through the exchange of gifts between groups, the social bond itself is constituted and manifests itself. The procedure of recognition at work in the ceremonial gift is a *public* procedure. Ricoeur indicated that the recognition at work in the ceremonial gift "does not recognize itself," it is "unaware of itself." For Hénaff, the ceremonial gift cannot remain unknown or unrecognized. "Not only *must it be known*, but if it is not, it misses its goal, which is precisely to bring about reciprocal and public recognition in order to create or reinforce the social bond." (Hénaff 2010, 115).

Finally, we should bear in mind that Hénaff presents the ceremonial gift as a codified gift. Rites codify the attitudes of the partners "to preclude the risk that would be generated by excessive arbitrariness and to neutralize variations in private feelings or in short-lived emotions." (Hénaff 2010, 140). The "state of peace" discussed by Ricoeur, the exchange of generous gifts as a form of *agape*, is beyond any form of conventionality. Following the excessive logic of love, these gifts are unpredictable. They defy any form of comparison, equivalence, or rule. Whereas the ceremonial gift must be understood as a conventional practice, the generous Ricoeurian gift only seems to refer to the spontaneity of singular individuals.

Given these various precisions, it is understandable that those acquainted with Marcel Hénaff's work would be surprised to see that Ricoeur tries bringing together his own reflections on the gift with the reciprocal ceremonial gift analyzed by Hénaff. This feeling is only intensified if we realize that the ceremonial gift is a practice of traditional societies[14] and no longer has

the responsibility and burden to assure public recognition. This is principally assured by law and money: "*the public recognition of each person is ensured by the law*, before which all the members of the citizen community are equal." (Hénaff 2010, 397). Marcel Hénaff also shows, by following Simmel, how the process of recognition plays out through money, as that which frees relations from personal dependence: "Every coin (or bill) embodies a contract between issuing power and user. It represents reciprocal commitment, an implicit convention. (. . .) Whoever possesses cash is by right a member of the community of citizens who produce and exchange goods within the political space in which the currency is legal tender." (Hénaff 2010, 338).

Ricoeur was indeed well aware of the fact that the reciprocal ceremonial gift is a practice of primitive societies. He does not make the mistake of applying an analysis which focuses on the latter to our own political societies. But, nevertheless, I would like to claim that he is reflecting upon the possibility that the ceremonial gift could teach us something in terms of an anthropology of *l'homme capable*. That is to say, for Ricoeur, there is something at stake in the practice of the gift-giving of primitive societies which could tell us something about man at a fundamental level, a level beyond experience taken in its historical dimension.

For Ricoeur, if the ritual forms of the ceremonial gift have disappeared, we can in any case still find a trace of them in our societies. According to him, the ceremony of gift giving in primitive societies was intended to differentiate the exchange of gifts from ordinary and economic forms of exchange. He takes the "festive" to be "la trace du cérémoniel dans nos cultures." (Ricoeur 2004a, 44). The ceremony of gift-giving in primitive societies and the festive character of the exchange of generous gifts in our societies have the same goal: to protect what is "without price" in the exchanges of gifts, the experience of recognition at work in them, from forms of market economy. For Ricoeur, there is something "equivalent"[15] between the ceremonial gift and the festive exchange of gifts in our societies. He takes this insight even further and claims that, in the different forms of gift exchange, we see the manifestation of a "transcultural, transhistorical capacity." I would like to suggest that Ricoeur poses the capacity to give unilaterally as the ability which makes the experience of symbolic mutual recognition between actors possible.

The goal of this article is not to criticize the Ricoeurian project of trying to draw out, from ethnological studies, that which could be said of man at the most fundamental level. And neither do I want to deny the existence of the gift exchange as a form of *agape*.[16] The critique that I would like to address at Ricoeur concerns the very presuppositions underlying his theory of mutual recognition. I would like to suggest that Ricoeur, by expecting "states of

peace" to reply to the risk of an unhappy consciousness generated by the interminable character of the struggle for recognition, himself makes use of nonjustified presuppositions.

Different analytical distinctions made by Marcel Hénaff permit us to precisely identify and question presuppositions underlying the Ricoeurian conception of the generous gift. The distinction that the former makes between three types of gifts (ceremonial gift, gracious gift and the gift of solidarity) is, on this point, particularly useful. It enables us to realize that the Ricoeurian gift, rather than being a figure of the ceremonial gift, actually corresponds to what Hénaff refers to as the "gracious gift":

> *Gracious giving*—from parent to child, friend to friend, or lover to lover—is meant above all to make others happy. It is a gesture without any expectation of reciprocation and without any association with a situation of scarcity. It is *unilateral* giving, whose purpose is not to meet a need; such is Roman *gratia*, or *charis*, which in Greek means at the same time joy and grace. (Hénaff 2011, 10).

Can we expect that such a gracious gesture between friends or between parents could reinforce, as the ceremonial gift does, the social bond? Is it capable of binding together partners and engaging them in the struggle for recognition so that they "act with and for others in just institutions?" Recall that, for Hénaff, in our political societies, the responsibility of public recognition is put in the hands of law and money. As for the gracious gift, it operates in the domain of interpersonal relationships. Is it legitimate to attribute to such a gift the power to have an influence on society as a whole? Doesn't Ricoeur presuppose that the gracious gift, by mimetic contagion, would be able to "unleash an irradiating and irrigating wave that, secretly and indirectly, contributes to the advance of history toward states of peace?" (Ricoeur 2005, 245). It has already been pointed out above that, for Ricoeur, the *possibility* of a peaceful coexistence, beyond fatalism and despair, depends upon the action of the excessive logic of love overriding the logic of equivalence of justice. But can we really expect that the logic of excessive love at work in the gracious gifts, as practiced between individuals, could affect the logic of justice and market economy?

Another distinction made by Marcel Hénaff, the distinction he draws between reciprocity and mutuality, also proves to be useful in calling into question certain aspects of Ricoeurian anthropology. First of all, Hénaff distinguishes the two concepts in terms of the number of agents involved. Reciprocity, according to Hénaff is always dual. "It is a confrontation, whether benevolent or hostile. This precisely the field of the Greek concept of *agôn*, which can be formulated as follows: 1 *vs.* 1." (Hénaff 2011, 17). As for mutuality, it is more indeterminate. It can be dual, "but in that case duality is merely the first module in a plural relationship. It can therefore be formulated

as 2 + *n*. Mutuality bonds together the many members of a group. It constitutes a network." (Hénaff 2011, 17). Reciprocity and mutuality also distinguish themselves from one another according to the nature of the kind of action in both:

> in the case of reciprocity, the action of one agent always depends on the action of the other. The sequence of events involves indeterminacy, uncertainty, and risk. The action takes place in a permanent state of imbalance. It is characterized by *alternating dissymmetry* (as when a ball is sent back and forth, or when presents are ceremonially exchanged). In the case of mutuality, on the other hand, there is a general state of balance, a homogeneity that spreads to all the members of the group: there is *multiplied symmetry*. (Hénaff 2011, 18)

But what we truly need to get out heads around is that, for Hénaff, reciprocity derives from the space and temporality of *agôn*. Mutuality implies a departure from the space and temporality of *agôn*. In this context, Hénaff writes the following:

> The space of mutuality spreads after conflict has been overcome. It is literally a *state of peace*, in the sense Ricoeur uses the phrase. It exists only because a common element—*mutuum* –has already been recognized among the members of a community. In that sense, it presupposes that the difference between the alien and the self, between otherness and sameness, has been accepted. (Hénaff 2011, 18–19)

What is of particular interest in this last citation is the fact Hénaff asserts that, in order for relations of mutuality to realize themselves, there must be a "common element [. . . which] has already been recognized among the members of a community." But isn't this exactly what Ricoeur is led to presuppose when he expects that a generous gift, as a form of *agape*, could engage us in a peaceful co-existence? Doesn't Hénaff's definition of mutuality tempt us to put forth the hypothesize that Ricoeur presupposes that these gifts will, somehow, activate, awake, something in common between the members of a society, that is, an excessive potentiality which runs through them, a capacity of *agape*? Are we not led to raise such a hypothesis in order to explain the social performativity expected of the exchange of generous gifts as a form of *agape*?

Throughout this article, I hope to have shown that the problematic of the gift in Ricoeur has raised much perplexity and made use of a number of non-justified presuppositions. The underlying impulse behind this work has been the conviction that, by returning to Marcel Hénaff's work, we would be better equipped to identify and call into question these presuppositions. I have tried to show that, when Ricoeur speaks of the ceremonial gift, what is

truly at stake is what Hénaff refers to ask the gracious gift. The question that then arises is whether or not Ricoeur expects that the gracious gift is capable of something which it is, of itself, unable to offer.

It is still the case that the subject of Ricoeur's reflections is, in my view, of paramount importance. What, in our societies, can unite and bind us together in the struggle for recognition, beyond the forms of social recognition established by law and money? If we only have access to these two forms of recognition, aren't our societies condemned to suffer from a "lack of specific recognition" (Hénaff 2010, 397)[17] in the words of Marcel Hénaff? What can respond to this deficiency? Rather than overestimating the power of love, would it not be better to think about what could, in our societies, take the reins of the process of recognition between groups at work in the ceremonial gift? Far from being a closed case, the issues brought forth by the problematic of the gift still remain, in my view, quite relevant.

NOTES

A modified version of this article has been previously published in French in *Teoria e Critica della Regolazione Sociale* Quaderno 2011. Accessed October 25, 2011. www.lex.unict.it/tcrs/numero/2011/Testo%20Loute.pdf. The author would like to thank Joseph Carew for the translation of the current text.

1. Translation proposed: "the cultural limitations which constitute their historicity and thus can be lifted from the historical to the fundamental."
2. Translation proposed: "transhistorical, transcultural capacities where the humanity of man recognizes itself."
3. Ricoeur rejects "the idea that reason by itself is practical, that is to say, governs as reason without regard to desire." (Ricoeur 1991, 198)
4. In another context I have tried to develop, in a more amply fashion, this interpretation of practical wisdom as a moment of the "*petite éthique*," which, far from limiting itself to the contextual realization of norms, refers to this fundamental disproportion between the ethical aim and moral norms. If the reader is interested, please consult my work (Loute 2008, 266-277).
5. For Ricoeur, the different types of positive relationships we can have with ourselves—in the form of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem—constitute an ideal guiding the struggle for recognition but which is never fully achieved. For a more detailed analysis of Ricoeur's interpretation of the theory of recognition of Axel Honneth, I refer the reader to one of my previous articles (Loute 2010).
6. Ricoeur references (Mauss 1923–1924).
7. Cited by Ricoeur (Ricoeur 2005, 227).
8. Cited par Ricoeur (Ricoeur 2005, 230).
9. Cited by Ricoeur (Ricoeur 2005, 282).
10. Translation proposed: "within the framework of the interpretation of the ceremonial gift in terms of symbolic mutual recognition through the thing given, can we integrate the moment of giving without return as a call for similar generosity?"
11. Ricoeur takes into account a paradox: "in recognizing a present by giving one in return, does one not destroy the original gift as a gift? If the first gesture in giving is one of generosity, the second, given under the obligation to make some return, annuls the gratuitous nature of the original gift" (Ricoeur 2005, 229).

12. Ricoeur writes : "si nous n'avions jamais eu l'expérience d'être reconnu, de reconnaître dans la gratitude de l'échange cérémoniel, nous serions des violents dans la lutte pour la reconnaissance" (Ricoeur 2004c, 27).

13. "It is remarkable that in encounters and processes of approach between two humans groups, bodily expressions, no matter how friendly, are not enough to establish recognition—in the sense of acceptance—but that an additional element is required: a physical element, a pledge of good faith, given a substitute for the group that offers an association: the thing given. No such procedure is found in any primate group." (Hénaff 2010, 133)

14. We must understand by traditional societies "the ones in which the essence of social relationships and statutory positions is determined by kinship systems." (Hénaff 2010, 108)

15. "Dans la relation de don entre les 'primitifs', comme on les appelait à cette époque-là, il y avait l'équivalent de ce que pour nous a d'abord été dans l'expérience grecque la découverte du 'sans prix' lié à l'idée de vérité—d'où le titre du livre de Hénaff, *Le prix de la vérité*: en réalité c'est le 'sans prix' de la vérité." (Ricoeur 2004c, 24)

16. We can indeed grant Ricoeur that love is *possible* and accept his affirmation that "there is love": "There is forgiveness as there is joy, as there is wisdom, extravagance, love." (Ricoeur 2004b, 467)

17. In political societies, "*the public recognition of each person is ensured by the law*, before which all the members of the citizen communities are equal. (. . .) but this arrangement is not capable of guaranteeing or protecting the bond that connects each member of the community to another or to the entire community. Neither civil membership nor economic independence calls on us to recognize the other *as a person*." (Hénaff 2010, 397)

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